

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**  
**Department of Education and Skills**

**Whole School Evaluation**  
**REPORT**

**Tigh Nan Dooley Special School**  
**Carraroe, County Galway**  
**Roll Number: 20329B**

**Date of inspection: 19 September 2012**



**A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F**  
**O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N**  
**A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S**

## 1. Introduction

Tigh Nan Dooley is a special school located in Carraroe, Co. Galway. It provides an education to pupils with special educational needs including moderate, severe and profound general learning difficulties and autistic spectrum disorder. It is under the patronage of Ability West. The school received permanent recognition from the Department of Education and Skills in 2010. It operates through the medium of Irish.

This whole-school evaluation focused on the quality of teaching and learning in Communication and Language, Mathematics, Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE) and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE). The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

## 2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

The following are the **main strengths** of the work of the school:

- The school staff works in a very effective and unified manner to meet the needs of each pupil.
- The school has a highly effective principal who works diligently to provide a holistic and relevant education for the pupils.
- Exemplary links have been established with local national schools to promote the ongoing and progressive inclusion of pupils, where relevant.
- The quality of pupil management is excellent.
- The quality of teaching and learning in all subject areas is of a very high standard. The curriculum is differentiated effectively to address pupils' learning needs.
- The school has a very open ethos and friendly atmosphere. The daily whole-school assemblies greatly enhance staff collegiality and the very strong relationships between teachers and pupils promote a sense of community.

The following **main recommendations** are made:

- The board of management should continue to familiarise itself with its roles and responsibilities under the Education Act.
- The school should ensure a balance between organisational planning and curriculum planning. It is recommended that the teaching staff, with support from the board, should document their high quality whole-school approaches to teaching and learning in their curriculum plans.
- The ongoing investment in curriculum-related materials and resources is recommended to maximise the engagement of individual pupils.

### **3. Quality of School Management**

- The board of management meets regularly and maintains minutes of meetings. Specific tasks have been allocated to members of the board. The patron body manages the finances of the school and arranges the annual audit of accounts. The treasurer should be accorded specific financial responsibilities and should submit a report at every board meeting. The board of management should continue to familiarise itself with its roles and responsibilities under the Education Act and should consider the possibility of training for such a purpose.
- The school has a highly effective, diligent principal who promotes a happy learning environment. High standards of care and education are central to her vision. She is sensitive in her communication with the school community. She provides praiseworthy leadership to the hard-working and committed staff. In recent years energies have concentrated on matters of an organisational nature. It is now recommended that curricular and educational priorities be developed, with support from the board of management. To this end regular staff meetings should be organised to ensure such priorities can be addressed.
- The school building is maintained to the highest standard and provides a clean, bright, learning environment. A wide range of curricular resources supports teaching and learning. Further and ongoing investment in curricular resources will be required to maximise participation of individual pupils.
- There is very regular communication between home and school through daily communication logs. Annual meetings to discuss pupils' learning targets are organised between teachers, parents and a multi-disciplinary team. This leads to the development of individual education plans (IEPs). Parents are very supportive of the work of the school. The school has established exemplary links with local national schools and effective integration projects exist for specific pupils.
- The quality of pupil management is excellent. Pupils are managed with the greatest of sensitivity and care at all times. Every effort is made to reduce pupil frustrations through appropriate channels of communication.

### **4. Quality of School Planning and School Self-evaluation**

- The school has begun the process of developing a school plan and to date has focused on organisational planning. A large number of practices and procedures have been implemented by staff but have not yet been documented. It is timely that the school engages in a school self-evaluation process to prioritise areas for development. This will ensure that the school's practices and procedures are documented for the school community.
- The teaching staff plans consistently and carefully for each class. Planning is of a very good quality. Teachers also seek to meet the needs of individual pupils through the IEP where long-term goals regarding each area of the curriculum are laid out.
- Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* without modification and that the school is compliant with the requirements of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*.

## 5. Quality of Teaching, Learning and Pupil Achievement

- The quality of overall teaching, learning and pupil achievement is very good in all subject areas evaluated. A wide range of teaching methodologies, which emphasise pupil participation and child-centred learning, is used by all teachers. Some very effective whole-school learning experiences are organised for the pupils. Daily whole-school assemblies greatly contribute to the creation of a positive school climate and atmosphere. The very strong teacher-pupil relationships greatly enhance pupils' learning, engagement and understanding.
- The quality of teaching and learning in Language and Communication is very good. The school organises daily whole-school language lessons to reinforce vocabulary and to provide various contexts for using language. There is extensive use of visual aids, including LAMH (communication augmentation sign system) and PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System). All staff has availed of LAMH training. This ensures an effective signing environment within the school. The use of switches for non-verbal pupils ensures their participation in lessons. A structured approach to phonological awareness and to individualised reading programmes is implemented where relevant. The results are highly commendable. The school has a large variety of books that appeal to all learners. In addition, teachers make class books, both electronically and in hard copy.
- The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics is very good. Incidental learning is promoted through structured and unstructured play. Pupils are given regular opportunities to develop a sense of time and a sense of spatial awareness throughout the school day. Mathematical language is consistently reinforced. The inclusion of number rhymes in daily lessons would further support this. There is a need to provide resources for each individual pupil, where possible, to maximise their engagement.
- The quality of teaching and learning in Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE) is very good. Content is related profitably to pupils' lives and builds on their prior knowledge. They are active in exploring and investigating the environments around the school. Teachers reinforce and stimulate curiosity and imagination. The school should consider organising a module on social outings with clearly defined learning objectives to further develop pupils' sense of place and space in a wider environment.
- The quality of teaching and learning in Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) in individual classes and at whole-school level is very good. Pupils' social skills are developed as they are encouraged to communicate, work co-operatively and make choices. Parents expressed strong support for the school's current swimming programme. Specific objectives from the SPHE curriculum should be incorporated into this programme as a means of furthering pupils' social and life skills. The board of management should critically discuss these issues. It is important that swimming lessons enhance the overall educational provision for pupils while not compromising the integrity of the curriculum.
- The quality of assessment is good. The school has a range of assessment procedures to document pupil progress including the use of work portfolios and individual pupils' IEP targets. Teachers could devise a range of checklists to record the extent of pupil engagement in activities within their short-term planning objectives as a means of developing assessment in the school.

## **6. Quality of Support for Pupils**

- The school's commitment to its pupils is evident in all aspects of school life. The patron, Ability West, is highly commended for providing very valuable training for staff as needs arise. The school's volunteer body also helps with activities which require one-to-one support such as swimming and cooking.
- The school works very effectively with multi-disciplinary teams from the health service and Ability West. Additional services are provided such as speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, music therapy and behaviour therapy. The school also has access to a psychological service and social workers.
- A team of special needs assistants (SNAs) works very effectively to support the individual needs of pupils with sensitivity and care. They work diligently under the direction of teachers and greatly enhance the work of the school.
- The school nurse provides a caring, attentive presence to the pupils who present with health issues. She works effectively with school staff to ensure pupils' health needs are addressed in an educational environment.
- The school cook reinforces each pupil's language and communication programme very effectively and gives great support to senior pupils in developing their vocational skills.